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## Extended essay cover

Diploma Programme subject in which this extended essay is registered: World Studies (Equality & Inequality)  
(For an extended essay in the area of languages, state the language and whether it is group 1 or group 2.)

Title of the extended essay: The effect of cultural disparities between the US & China that ultimately affect the assumption that the world is flat as purported in Thomas L. Friedman's "The World is Flat" & "Hot, Flat, & Crowded".

### Candidate's declaration

*This declaration must be signed by the candidate; otherwise a grade may not be issued.*

The extended essay I am submitting is my own work (apart from guidance allowed by the International Baccalaureate).

I have acknowledged each use of the words, graphics or ideas of another person, whether written, oral or visual.

I am aware that the word limit for all extended essays is 4000 words and that examiners are not required to read beyond this limit.

This is the final version of my extended essay.

### **Supervisor's report and declaration**

*The supervisor must complete this report, sign the declaration and then give the final version of the extended essay, with this cover attached, to the Diploma Programme coordinator.*

Name of supervisor (CAPITAL letters)

*Please comment, as appropriate, on the candidate's performance, the context in which the candidate undertook the research for the extended essay, any difficulties encountered and how these were overcome (see page 13 of the extended essay guide). The concluding interview (viva voce) may provide useful information. These comments can help the examiner award a level for criterion K (holistic judgment). Do not comment on any adverse personal circumstances that may have affected the candidate. If the amount of time spent with the candidate was zero, you must explain this, in particular how it was then possible to authenticate the essay as the candidate's own work. You may attach an additional sheet if there is insufficient space here.*

*This declaration must be signed by the supervisor; otherwise a grade may not be issued.*

I have read the final version of the extended essay that will be submitted to the examiner.

To the best of my knowledge, the extended essay is the authentic work of the candidate.

I spent 

|   |
|---|
| 3 |
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 hours with the candidate discussing the progress of the extended essay.

## Assessment form (for examiner use only)

| Criteria                      | Achievement level               |         |                      |         |                      |  |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------|----------------------|---------|----------------------|--|
|                               | Examiner 1                      | maximum | Examiner 2           | maximum | Examiner 3           |  |
| A research question           | <input type="text" value="1"/>  | 2       | <input type="text"/> | 2       | <input type="text"/> |  |
| B introduction                | <input type="text" value="1"/>  | 2       | <input type="text"/> | 2       | <input type="text"/> |  |
| C investigation               | <input type="text" value="1"/>  | 4       | <input type="text"/> | 4       | <input type="text"/> |  |
| D knowledge and understanding | <input type="text" value="1"/>  | 4       | <input type="text"/> | 4       | <input type="text"/> |  |
| E reasoned argument           | <input type="text" value="2"/>  | 4       | <input type="text"/> | 4       | <input type="text"/> |  |
| F analysis and evaluation     | <input type="text" value="1"/>  | 4       | <input type="text"/> | 4       | <input type="text"/> |  |
| G use of subject language     | <input type="text" value="1"/>  | 4       | <input type="text"/> | 4       | <input type="text"/> |  |
| H conclusion                  | <input type="text" value="1"/>  | 2       | <input type="text"/> | 2       | <input type="text"/> |  |
| I formal presentation         | <input type="text" value="1"/>  | 4       | <input type="text"/> | 4       | <input type="text"/> |  |
| J abstract                    | <input type="text" value="1"/>  | 2       | <input type="text"/> | 2       | <input type="text"/> |  |
| K holistic judgment           | <input type="text" value="1"/>  | 4       | <input type="text"/> | 4       | <input type="text"/> |  |
| Total out of 36               | <input type="text" value="12"/> |         | <input type="text"/> |         | <input type="text"/> |  |

IB Extended Essay

Subject: World Studies

Title: The effect of cultural disparities between the US and China that ultimately affect the assumption that the world is flat as purported in Thomas L. Friedman's "The world is Flat" and "Hot, Flat and Crowded"

Research Question: How is the world flat, pertaining to equal opportunity, when China has such cultural differences?

Student Name:

Word Count: 3242

## Abstract

The research question of this extended essay is a questioning of the validity of Thomas L. Friedman's claim that the world is "flat". Friedman purports in his book "The World is Flat" that when talking about the current opportunity in commerce and ventures that there is a "level playing field" due to the "global network" of communication that now connects us all. People that live hundreds of miles away can now communicate at a moments notice but also conduct business making the realm of possibilities endless and accessible to all. He claims that the free exchange of information and ideas is common throughout the world. I have found this not to be true in my experiences and interactions during a trip to China. Through daily discussions, interviews and experiences I was able to investigate the differences in Chinese culture: conducting business, differences in city to city culture and customs, general customs, personal relationships, the current youth, and governmental controls. I have found that certain significant cultural disparities limit the Chinese citizens in participation and involvement in this "level playing field". One of the clearest cultural disparities is China's strict control of internet accessibility. This is the most obvious limit on China's possible involvement and participation in opportunities in this "global network". It is concluded that Friedman's idea of a "flat world" does not apply to China. On a basic cultural level they interact with each other and the outside world in a very unique manner. China sways his assertion because its citizens do not share the same level of accessibility to this "global network", due to the controls of the government and their specific customs, thus greatly limiting their ability for interaction and opportunities.

Word Count: 284

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## **How is the world flat, pertaining to equal opportunity, when China has such cultural differences?**

### Introduction

This summer I was able to read Thomas L. Friedman's book "The World is Flat" which discusses the idea that the world is shrinking and people can communicate and collaborate regardless the distance between them. He also asserts that the "playing field is level", that there is equal opportunity for communication and commerce regardless of your global location. I had the opportunity to travel to China for six weeks. While I was there I went to almost every major city, Hong Kong, Hangzhou, Xi An, Beijing, and Shanghai. Not only was I able to experience China from a tourist's point of view but I was also able experience how business is being conducted in China. I was able to attend numerous business meetings with my mother. My mother has been in the fashion industry for a little over 30 years, and her business has mainly taken place in China. Traveling with her, I experienced drastic cultural differences pertaining to manners and norms of the cultures in business interactions and in every day life. It was during this trip that I was able to personally observe these differences. These observations occurred through first hand conversations with Chinese citizens and business people, and interactions with everyday Mainland Chinese people. Thomas L. Friedman puts forth the idea that the world is "flat", meaning that there is equal opportunity for commerce, but in my experience of Asia I was able to see it in a very different light. While the world may be flat for most countries it definitely is not for China in many aspects.

According to Friedman what connects the world, thereby making it “flat”, and an equal playing field for opportunity, is the idea that a global network connects us all. This is global access to communication is the main support for the basis of Friedman’s argument, but in China there are serious restrictions on internet access. In a recent New York Times article it has been cited that Internet restriction has been even more increased in recent years. “The authorities periodically detain and even jail Internet users for politically sensitive or critical comments, calls for a multiparty political system, or accusations of impropriety by local officials” (Bradsher). This limit on communication, websites and what is said limits the possibility of genuine interaction and collaboration internally and externally. If there is not the ability for genuine interaction with China then how is it possible that the playing field is level? For the playing field for communication and commerce to be level this global network must be accessible to all and there should be no restrictions to what can be discussed and the information being exchanged.

Regardless of this “global network” being accessible to all there are vast cultural differences that divide the possibilities for collaboration. For ultimate collaboration to occur and breakthroughs to be possible, these differences must be bridged and we must better understand each other in every way. Some major cultural differences between China’s people and the west lay within the areas of customs, aspirations and ways of communicating with one another.



### Communication Through Language:

The definition of collaboration is; “to work jointly with others or together especially in an intellectual endeavor” (Webster). In the Chinese language what is said is not always completely what is meant. In Taiwan my mom and I spent time with her friend of twenty-five years, . has worked in the fashion industry for at least thirty years and discussed major issues when dealing with makers in China. Her main complaint was that they did not always say what they meant and would tend to downplay big issues. educated us on the meaning of “no problem”. When you have an issue with a maker in China and you discuss it, they will typically console your complaint or worry with the response “no problem”. This could mean a multitude of things. They could be saying there really is no problem. They could be saying there is a problem and they will take care of it so there is no need for worry. They could be saying there is a problem and they are embarrassed to discuss it. This lack of clarity often prevents problems from being solved. In most “western” cultures when an issue arises, frank and immediate discussion is used to solve that issue. This huge difference in styles of communication further complicates the idea that the world is flat. The styles and methods of communication and what is ultimately understood are often not parallel.

### Face:

This leads into another obstacle in communication, the idea of “saving face”. “Face is a concept not hard to understand because, even as Westerners, everyone has face. When equated to Western values, face is very similar to the notion of reputation and conduct. Face is a dynamic which applies to both personal and

business relationships in China” (Melendez). Basically, custom dictates that you do not directly call out a person’s mistake in the Chinese culture, particularly in business situations. I attended a meeting between my mother and a maker for a clothing project she is working on. The owner of the factory, , whom my mother knows personally, the head merchandiser, her assistant, the fabric specialist, my mother and myself were sitting around a table discussing the development of the product. After carefully reviewing the sample my mother started by complimenting the quality of the sample. She needed to politely approach the question of where was the pricing information she requested 8 weeks prior. She gave them an opportunity to discuss how and when they would be able to supply her with this information. She specifically did not dwell on the fact that it had been an 8 week delay, but focused on going forward. She emphasized the fact that the buyer (my mother’s client) was pressing her for the information, and could assist her in answering her client. This is a perfect example of allowing a business colleague to save face. She began by complimenting the work and did not directly call any of them out for their lack of follow through. Lastly she posed the need for information as a result of her client pressuring her, almost removing any possible hint of direct blame within the room. After the meeting I asked why she approached this in such a round about manner. She has years of experience and knows how to properly approach Chinese business colleagues in order to allow them to save face and to efficiently move forward. For commerce and business to work certain cultural nuances, exactly like this, need to be well understood and handled with care.

### Governmental Corruption and Graft:

There is also a major problem with government corruption within China in relation to businesses. While in Shanghai I met with a colleague and friend of my mother's, , who owns her own fabric and weaving production company. One of the most interesting things she discussed was the fact that even though her offices are located in Shanghai, she incorporated her business in Hong Kong to avoid paying certain domestic restrictive taxes on her business. Hong Kong, though considered to be part of China, still has a separate government, currency, and laws. She explained that if she established her business in Shanghai or anywhere else within mainland China, it would cause her to be a target for periodical shakedowns and pay offs by various government officials. This is a very common practice, and part of conducting everyday business within China. is a Chinese citizen, and chose the only way possible for her to protect her business. She happens to be a relatively wealthy business owner, who has the opportunity and choice on how to protect her business. However most common Chinese citizens have no choice or opportunity to choose for themselves. How can the playing field be flat and even when citizens of the same country do not share the same freedoms?

### Governmental Control on Foreign Investors or Business:

This idea of government interference poses a problem for joint ventures within China. A foreign person cannot come into China and establish a business on their own. They are required to take on a Chinese partner who is required to have controlling interest (more than 60%) in the company. During my trip I was able to

meet another colleague of my mother's. Lincoln is the director of development for a major international furniture company, Halo Asia. Timothy Oulton, a British citizen, owns Halo Asia which is headquartered in Hong Kong. However, the Halo factory is located inside China, in Foshan. Even though Mr. Oulton is bringing major commerce into mainland China, he cannot own the factory where the collections of his furniture are made. He has a Chinese "partner" who owns the factory, yet his employee, Lincoln, runs the factory. Interestingly, Lincoln is Hong Kongneese. Hong Kong citizens are unique in that they are very different from Mainland Chinese people. He was educated in private secondary boarding schools, and went to University in England. He is extremely well educated, well read, well traveled and sophisticated. Tim hired Lincoln specifically because he is uniquely able to interact easily with western clients and then able to clearly direct and manage the local Chinese workforce inside the factory. Lincoln is Chinese, yet clearly unique in his vast range of skills and ability to communicate because of his Hong Kongneese upbringing and the strong British colonial influences that remain there. Tim has cleverly managed to level the playing field within the parameters of the rules of conducting business within China. However, despite bringing major business to a local community, employing many Chinese citizens and exporting a large volume of product, he still cannot privately own the business.

#### Desire or Ability to leave China:

In some ways China could be seen as a land of opportunity but at the same time many want to leave for greater opportunities and real freedom. In many

instances parents want to send their children to America for University. They want them to get what they consider to be a superior education and to also interact with Americans and learn the customs and culture. However, this option is not available to all Chinese citizens. It is extremely costly to travel outside of China and the Chinese government is extremely protective of their young women leaving the country. Costly fees and long waiting periods for travel visas occur for the young women. Often they are not granted permission to leave for travel or education. The concern is the possibility that they will meet and marry a foreigner and choose not to return to China. Due to the one child law within China, put into effect to control the population growth, there is now an extreme shortage of young women. Customarily a son is responsible to care for his parents in their old age. When the "one child" law went into effect, often-female babies were either aborted or given up for adoption outside the China. The goal was to have a male baby, a son. This has now caused a huge problem that there are not enough women within China. Recently there has been a discussion to repeal this law in order to bring back into balance the male to female population ratio. There is also an opportunity for wealthy Chinese to have as many children as they want. They simply pay a fine of approximately \$6,000 USD in order to have another child. This amount of y is often more than an average Chinese family will make in income in an entire year, obviously preventing them from having more than one child at this time.

### Inability to access the Internet:

One of the most notable things when inside China is the limited accessibility to the internet. Most importantly almost all social network sites are banned. I personally experienced this when I met my mother's friend's kids, \_\_\_\_\_, 17 years old and \_\_\_\_\_, 15 years old. They are culturally unique as they were born in Taiwan and moved to Mainland China when they were approximately 7 and 5 years old. They return to Taiwan every summer and Chinese New Year to visit family and friends. Though Taiwan is named as a Republic of China, they consider themselves to be distinctly separate. They have their own government system, laws, currency and freedom of expression and speech. While \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ are in Taiwan they have full access to all social media sites as well as free access to all internet sites. Inside China they are not allowed access to these sites but apparently, according to \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, there are ways to gain access to Facebook. Most kids use applications to gain access and have profiles on the main social networks. However, they still cannot gain access to websites with international information. This is a very remarkable example of the lack of informational freedom within China and its inability to connect with the outside world.

### Discrimination amongst Chinese:

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_'s parents, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ are seeking to leave China. After 15 years of owning a home furnishing business, they have concluded that they cannot stay and make a living inside China. Though they are Chinese, they are Taiwanese and local Chinese do not consider them to be "real" Chinese. This

silent cultural obstacle is constantly present. They often find they cannot count on business agreements that have been made for production, causing them to lose contracts. They are culturally different in their language accent and mannerisms which cause them to be singled out, noticed and ostracized. Local Chinese are suspicious of them and reluctant to extend business relationships or friendships. The kids talked with me often about having acutely experienced this "discrimination" in school. The Chinese style of teaching is lecture based, where students sit and listen to rote lessons, with no opportunity for discussion or interaction. Because of [redacted] and [redacted]'s international upbringing, they have been encouraged by their parents to discuss and question ideas. Their English and knowledge of international events and information is often much better than the instructors charged with teaching them. This is a source of harsh treatment and ridicule, by instructors and other students. [redacted] had to get special permission from the school so that [redacted] and [redacted] could miss non-mandatory summer extension school in order for them to join us on part of our trip. Many Chinese kids never get to travel inside China. My mother, posing as a professional advisor, wrote a letter explaining that she was coming to spend time with [redacted] and [redacted], to advise them on career opportunities and college choices. This was the only way for them to be released, and have the ability to travel. When speaking to both of them, through their intelligent and articulate observations, the lack of simple freedoms for them inside China are so completely apparent. They both are seeking to go to college in America, and [redacted] and [redacted] would love to immigrate and settle in the US.

### Something as Simple as Food and Table Manners:

In China certain things are acceptable, pertaining to manners that would make an American very uncomfortable. When my mom and I were having dinner with \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ we would often have conversations about different foods. \_\_\_\_\_ is an amazing cook, willing to try to create many international dishes. Though they still all enjoy what many Chinese consider to be local delicacies: duck blood soup, chicken feet, tripe and organs, the whole fish steamed and served, the whole chicken roasted and hacked into pieces head, feet, bones and all. Midway through one particular dinner I heard this hacking coughing noise, and turning I saw a man, in his mid thirties, spitting a claw from a chicken foot he was eating onto the table. First of all, I would never be able to eat a chicken foot because just looking at it makes me queasy. To me it is clearly the dirtiest part of a chicken, being mostly in the muck and excrement. How could it possibly be properly cleaned and sanitized so that it would be edible? Seeing this man eat the foot and then spit the claw onto the table was just atrocious for me. However, spitting a bone, skin or food onto the table during a meal is common. In comparison to America there are certain aspects of etiquette everyone follows, and this would not be acceptable in any way. Now it must be realized that in context for an average Chinese person this is a completely normal occurrence and they would not take issue. Contextually, if I had been brought up with this I would not find it upsetting or unusual. My mother kept reminding me, these are simply differences. It is not wrong, just different. We must be open and not judge the differences in cultural



habits. It was so different it made me uncomfortable at times, and if my mother was not there to point this out I would have been offended and probably disgusted.

“Chinglaise”:

Tourism is a major source of commerce for China. I was able to travel to the cities of Hong Kong: the seat of sophisticated and international business, Hangzhou: the scenic West Lake and tea plantation area, Xi An: the original capital and site of the Ming tombs and the Emperor’s Terra Cotta Army and the oldest Mosque, Beijing: now the capitol and site of the Imperial Forbidden City, the Great Wall and Temple of Heaven, and Shanghai: the “Pearl” of the east and China’s most international city. In all our travels we were constantly amazed to encounter breathtaking cultural sites and display of history. However we were also amazed at the severe lack of communicating this valuable history and information. Most historical descriptions or explanations of cultural sights were glaringly inaccurate or simply not understandable. For example in the Shanghai National Museum there was a section dedicated to bronze cups from the Tang dynasty, the information card describing the item read “an example of the prosperity of flowering eges of a cup”. What did that tell us of the history, making technique, location of discovery? We traveled all the way there to learn and see everything we could about China, the history, evolution and culture, however the simple lack of communicating this prevented us from really learning what we came to see. There are many Chinese people who speak English extremely well, however the lack of understanding and basic explaining was mostly unclear. It became a game to read and try and translate the

“Chinglaise”, a bad mix of Chinese allegorical speech patterns and the attempt at an English equivalent. Chinese is a very flowery and complex language, however English tends to be more informational. But what was so remarkable was that even though correcting the signs and information is completely possible, that no attempt to clarify has been made. This disinterest in really explaining such valuable historical information for visiting tourists is sad. China is not allowing other cultures to fully appreciate all her history has to offer. This lack of an attempt to clearly communicate history or cultural significances is a common hindrance for the world to really be able to appreciate or come to understand Chinese culture.

#### Conclusion:

Given my personal experiences, interaction and discussions during my trip I have found that China does not share a “level playing field” in relation to the outside world. Thomas Freedman’s assertion that the entire world is “flat” is inaccurate. China’s governmental controls in technology and communication, business practices and laws prevent genuine freedom for interaction with others. Their numerous cultural differences in communication, business, mannerisms, unsaid rules and language are often equally large obstacles for the Chinese people to interact freely. Because of these numerous combined differences it results in a limited access to the “global network”, which greatly prevents them from fully participating in business commerce and cultural opportunities.

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